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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7370
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 3082
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 1186
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3384
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 5783
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 4757
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3458
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 001429

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: MOROCCAN MINORITY RETURNS EXISTING MAJORITY

Classified by Ambassador Thomas Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: A paltry third of the Moroccan electorate returned the current majority parties in the September 7 parliamentary elections. The vote was fair and transparent. The low turnout of 37 percent and high number of blank or protest ballots are a sharp critique of the political parties, and, less widely acknowledged, of the system that keeps them powerless. As best as we can tell, however, support for the King remains strong. Contrary to expectations, the nationalist Istiqlal came in first, with more seats than the Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD), which appears to have obtained the highest popular vote. The PJD has griped about vote buying, but has not accused the GOM of fraud. On balance, due to their unprecedented transparency, these elections were a modest advance toward democracy. We recommend nuanced praise for the fair and transparent election, while noting the need for continued reform. Proposed language is in para 11. End summary.

¶2. (C) Morocco's September 7 parliamentary elections were conducted with unprecedented fairness and remarkable transparency. For the first time ever, a formal international observation mission was invited to Morocco, organized by NDI and funded by the USG. They concluded that the voting "went smoothly and was characterized by a spirit of transparency and professionalism," notwithstanding reports of "isolated irregularities." One of the international observers who also had been here in 2002, said this year's election was "head and shoulders" better than the last one.

¶3. (C) Unfortunately, electoral turnout was reported at an all-time low. Only 37 percent of registered voters cast ballots, in spite of sustained and energetic efforts by both the GOM and some elements of civil society to mobilize the vote. (Both the far left and, implicitly, the dissident Islamist JCO had called for a boycott.)

¶4. (C) There was also a very high rate of blank or spoiled ballots, provisionally said to be around 20 percent (vice 17 percent in 2002). The international observers, noting that traditionally spoilage is under five percent, were certain this was a protest vote. One told us that in the polling station she watched, fully a third of the 150-odd ballots were invalid, but only three of them by error. The rest were crossed out across the whole ballot, littered with Arabic obscenities, or simply blank. The number of protest ballots equaled or exceeded those for any party.

¶5. (C) Both low turnout and the high rate of spoiled votes

were identified by the observers as a decisive popular expression of no confidence - neither in the parliament as an institution nor in the political parties that occupy it -- including the PJD. Considering the total eligible voter population, NDI informally noted that only about 19 percent of eligible Moroccans voted for any political party. The non-vote does not appear to have been against the King, whose right-hand man, who recently resigned his office to run for parliament, easily swept his district.

¶6. (C) The new parliament will look very much like the last one. Most prominent incumbents were returned. It will contain a fractionated mixture of political parties, with the top five parties holding between 12 and 17 percent of the seats. 24 different parties will be seated in the new parliament, two more than in the last parliament, a set-back for Palace calls for party consolidation.

¶7. (C) Confounding most expectations, the nationalist Istiqlal Party came out on top, with 52 seats (out of 325), two more than they won in 2002. The Socialist USFP was the biggest loser, down from 50 seats in 2002 to 36 this year. Many of USFP's major figures lost their seats. The majority coalition of the previous Parliament will almost assuredly be reconstituted, this time with Istiqlal at the head.

¶8. (C) Most significantly, the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD), which had confidently predicted that it would expand its presence by at least 50 and possibly even 100 percent, ultimately netted only a modest gain of five seats, ending with 47 out of 325 seats.

¶9. (C) Clearly stung by this disappointing result, a party

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spokesman cried foul, accusing opponents of vote-buying. "We came in second, corruption came in first," the party leader stated. It is significant the PJD did not accuse the GOM of malfeasance or manipulation of the results. While some vote-buying likely took place at the local level, it was driven out or underground by a stern GOM, with the personal engagement of the King. We assess such activities were much less than in any previous election.

¶10. (C) The EU Presidency issued a statement on September 8 praising Morocco's commitment to reform and the "democratic conditions" in which this year's polls took place. French President Sarkozy sent a letter of congratulations to the King.

¶11. (C) Over the weekend the MFA contacted Embassy Rabat to press for a positive official statement. We believe the Department may wish to issue a statement or consider a Secretarial or even Presidential message of congratulations

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to the King. We suggest the following language:

BEGIN TEXT

We congratulate the Kingdom of Morocco on the parliamentary elections staged on September 7. The elections were generally fair and transparent and a positive step towards reform. Low turnout and a large number of rejected ballots suggest the Moroccan people seek additional political reform. We remain committed to supporting the GOM's continued efforts in this direction.

END TEXT

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

RILEY